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UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND
PROPOSED PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

Recommendation by the Executive Director
Assistance to the Government of Gabon
Support for a comprehensive population programme

Proposed UNFPA assistance :	$2 million
Estimated value of the Government's contribution:	To be determined
Duration:	Five years
Estimated starting date:	January 1992
Executing agencies:	Government of Gabon United Nations and United Nations agencies and organizations National and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
Government coordinating agency:	Ministry of Planning, Economy and Regional Development

GABON

Demographic facts

Population Total (000)	
Total	1,172
Males	577
Females	594
Sex ratio (/100 females)	97.1
Urban	535
Rural	637
Per cent urban	45.7
Population in year 2000 (000)	1,612
Functional age groups (%)	
Young child: 0-4	14.8
Child: 5-14	17.6
Youth: 15-24	21.8
Elderly: 60+	9.0
65+	5.9
Women: 15-49	25.1
Median age (years)	23.2
Dependency ratios: total	62.1
(/100) Aged 0-14	52.6
Aged 65+	9.5
Agricultural population density (/hectare of arable land)	2.61
Population density (/sq. km.)	4
Average annual change (000)	
Population increase	42
Births	55
Deaths	20
Net migration	7
Annual population total (% growth)	3.29
Urban	5.11
Rural	1.63
Crude birth rate (/1000)	43.4
Crude death rate (/1000)	16.0
Net migration rate (/1000)	55
Total fertility rate (/woman)	5.34
Gross reproduction rate (/woman)	2.63
Net reproduction rate (/woman)	2.05
Infant mortality rate (/1000)	94
Life expectancy at birth (years)	
Males	51.9
Females	55.2
Both sexes	53.5
GNP per capita (U.S. dollars, 1989)	2,960

Sources: Population density on arable land is derived from two publications issued by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: FAO Production Yearbook 1985 and World-wide Estimates and Projections of Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Population Segments 1950-2025, ESS/MIS/86/2; gross national product per capita: World Bank, World Development Report 1991. Figures for population, total population by sex, population by age group, age indicators, urban-rural population, and population density (/sq. km.) refer to the year 1990; figures for average annual change, rate of annual change, and fertility and mortality are the five-year averages for 1990-1995. These data are from the Population Division, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, World population prospects: 1990.

I. SUMMARY

1. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) proposes to support a comprehensive population programme in the amount of $2 million from UNFPA's regular resources, over a five-year period, starting in January 1992, to assist the Government of Gabon in achieving its population and development objectives. This would be the second population programme for Gabon. The first programme, approved in 1988 for three years in the amount of $1.2 million ended, after a one-year extension, in December 1991.

2. The proposed programme is based on: (a) the Government's development priorities, and the recommendations of the National Seminar on Population and Development (March-April 1990); and (b) the findings and recommendations of the May 1991 Programme Review and Strategy Development (PRSD) exercise, which were discussed with various sectoral ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), agencies of the United Nations system, and multilateral and bilateral donors.

3. The programme would assist the Government of Gabon in achieving four broad objectives with corresponding strategies and programmes: (a) to define a national framework for population activities and the corresponding plan of action with a view to formulating a comprehensive population policy and to ensuring integration of population factors into the development planning process; (b) to reduce maternal and infant morbidity and mortality and to address the problems of infertility and adolescent pregnancy; and (c) to enhance the role and status of women and promote their full participation in the country's population and development activities.

4. All projects under the proposed programme, as in all UNFPA-assisted programmes, would be undertaken in accordance with the principles and objectives of the World Population Plan of Action; that is, that population policies should be consistent with internationally and nationally recognized human rights of individual freedom, justice, and the survival of national, regional and minority groups, (para. 14(d)); that respect for human life is basic to all human societies (para. 14 (e)); and that all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so (para. 14(f)).

II. BACKGROUND

5. Demographic trends. The population of Gabon was estimated by the Government at 1.4 million inhabitants in 1990. At the present rate of increase of 2.3 per cent per year,* the total population would reach 1.7 million in the year 2000 and would double in 30 years. While the fertility rate is stable, mortality rates are declining, and the crude death rate is now estimated at 15.6 per 1,000 compared to 20.2 per 1,000 in the early 1970s. This decrease is mainly due to declining infant mortality (99 per 1,000 in 1985-1990 compared to 132 per 1,000 in 1970-1975). The two factors that have contributed to the increase in population growth in the last 20 years are the decline of mortality and the high level of immigration. The urban population has increased eight-fold since 1960, and nearly half of the population currently lives in urban areas. This rapid

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*Current United Nations estimates are found in the data sheet on p. 2. This figure and the demographic data that follow are the Government's estimates based upon the results of the 1980 census, which was never fully processed. The United Nations figures do not take the 1980 figures into account and, the Government feels, overestimate both the crude birth rate and the immigration rate.

rate of urbanization has had a detrimental impact on rural areas, as some two-thirds of the country's 4,500 villages have disappeared in the past 30 years.

6. Gabon is classified as a middle-income country. However, because 38 per cent of its national income is derived from oil revenues (1990), its economy is vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices. Such overdependence on oil has caused an economic recession and made it difficult to establish a sound and sustainable foundation for economic development. As a result, the Government has abandoned its five-year development plan in favour of more flexible three-year programmes that are revised annually. Gabon imports 85 per cent of its foodstuffs and, despite a relatively high per capita income, it manifests characteristics of an underdeveloped country.

7. Gabon faces various environmental problems. For example, the uncontrolled and selective commercial exploitation of the tropical forest has led to deforestation and the degradation of the vegetation and fauna. In the cities, the environment suffers from the effects of a vastly-expanded population on the available land space.

8. Compared to other African countries, Gabon has a relatively good health infrastructure, providing access to health services to 78 per cent of the population. Moreover, according to a government survey conducted in 1988, nearly 80 per cent of deliveries are assisted by qualified health personnel. However, the deepening economic crisis has affected the operations of health facilities, and health personnel, while generally well qualified, lack training in public health. In addition, national professional health personnel tend to be concentrated in the large urban centres to the neglect of rural areas.

9. The main health problems affecting children in Gabon are infectious and parasitic diseases. Maternal mortality is estimated at 120 per 100,000 live births, the bulk of which are caused by complications during delivery or abortion. Infertility is a public health problem, and 70 per cent of the cases relate to secondary sterility (i.e., sterility caused by sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and abortion). In the absence of contraceptives, pregnancy among adolescents is common and in many cases ends in abortion. Sexually transmitted diseases are widespread and, in addition to being a frequent cause of sterility, also increase the probability of HIV infection. In early 1991, HIV seropositivity was estimated at 2 per cent in urban areas and 0.6 per cent in rural areas.

10. In Gabon, schooling is compulsory and school enrolment reaches almost 100 per cent. Between 1960 and 1989, as a result of considerable government investment in education, enrolment in primary and secondary schools increased, respectively, by 4 and 33 times. Girls make up 49 per cent of the total enrolment in primary schools and 44 per cent in secondary schools. However, the effects of the economic recession have also been felt in the education sector, which has had to operate with a reduced budget in recent years.

11. Although men and women are equal under the Constitution, many legal provisions still reflect gender inequalities that persist in everyday life. However, owing to efforts to eliminate legal barriers to gender equality, as well as to the positive effects of compulsory education and to the activities of women's organizations, opportunities in the economic and social spheres for women are increasing. Still, women's involvement in decision-making related to their reproductive role is limited by the 1920 French law prohibiting the use of contraceptives.

12. The Directorate General for Women's Promotion plays an active advocacy role for women's rights. Women organize themselves in associations by professional affiliation or common interests, and in urban neighbourhoods there are a multiplicity of women's associations of a religious or economic nature.

13. Gabon does not yet have an explicit population policy although the official position is pronatalist. It considers the total population too small compared to the human resources needed for the country's development. As a result, Gabon offers various incentives to increase fertility. Population factors are not sufficiently taken into account in development planning, although there are indications of a change in attitude within the Government towards the interlinkage between population and development.

III. REVIEW OF UNFPA AND OTHER ASSISTANCE TO DATE

14. In June 1988, the Governing Council approved the first programme of UNFPA assistance to Gabon in the amount of $1.2 million over the period 1988-1990. By the end of 1990, an amount of $0.8 million had been spent. Because of this slow implementation, the programme was extended to 31 December 1991. The expenditure for 1991 is estimated at $0.5 million.

15. The programme achieved good results in the maternal and child health (MCH) sector, where activities were focused on the Safe Motherhood Initiative, and in the information, education and communication (IEC) sector, where activities aimed at sensitizing decision makers and opinion leaders enhanced prospects for the development and implementation of a comprehensive population policy and programme. Such awareness creation was also instrumental in ensuring that population concerns were integrated into the national report on the environment, which was prepared for the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. However, no progress was made in the area of data collection. Moreover, programme implementation suffered as a result of the economic crisis, which hampered the Government's ability to provide its financial contribution. For some projects, the Government was not able to provide national staff according to the terms of the project agreement.

16. Overall, the first country programme helped to strengthen national institutions through the transfer of technical knowledge and training of national staff. Furthermore, in spite of regulations prohibiting the advertisement and sale of contraceptives, the programme contributed to a change in attitudes among government officials and the general public towards family planning, primarily as a result of a government-launched programme on Safe Motherhood. Consequently, family planning issues are discussed openly, and the sale of contraceptives is permitted in private pharmacies. The Government now accepts family planning as a means to improve the health of mothers and children. In addition, because of its concern with increasing levels of pregnancy and abortion among adolescents, the Government set up an interministerial commission to, among other things, revise the law on contraceptives. However, more sensitization activities are required to ensure that family planning information and services can be provided in the public sector.

Maternal and child health and family planning

17. UNFPA started its assistance to MCH activities in 1986 with the objective of strengthening MCH services at central and provincial levels with an emphasis on training. An evaluation of MCH activities conducted by UNFPA in May 1988 recommended that the training of field staff and the preparation of the MCH education manual be finalized and that MCH services be strengthened in the peripheral health units with an emphasis on maternal health. In response to these recommendations, UNFPA supported activities starting in January 1991 with the following objectives: (a) to elaborate a Safe Motherhood programme at the

central, provincial and local levels; (b) to support this programme by setting up a management information system (MIS), establishing training and supervisory programmes and developing IEC materials based on operations research; and (c) to implement the Safe Motherhood programme in Ngounie and Haut-Ogooué Provinces. In an effort to provide appropriate technical assistance, a National Safe Motherhood Committee has been established in Libreville as a technical unit. A baseline survey is being carried out by the Institut de Formation et Recherche Demographiques (IFORD) on maternal mortality and morbidity in Ngounie Province. UNFPA has also contributed to a knowledge-attitudes-practices (KAP) study on AIDS.

Information, education and communication

18. UNFPA assistance in the area of population IEC started in May 1990 with the objectives of designing, producing and testing a population education programme and materials specially adapted to Gabonese socio-cultural conditions. This involved analysing the existing curricula and educational materials, and undertaking a socio-economic study of the Gabonese family. The findings of such analyses will provide the basis for the design of educational materials, which will be used in a national IEC campaign scheduled to start during the first quarter of 1992, and of a manual on population education.

19. In 1989, the Directorate General for the Promotion of Women and Human Rights financed and organized a well-received educational campaign on sex education for 2,000 pupils in Libreville secondary schools. UNFPA supported a similar campaign for 4,000 pupils in February 1991.

Data collection and analysis

20. In the absence of census data, UNFPA assistance sought to strengthen the existing civil registration system and to support a demographic survey. Neither activity, however, was undertaken. A civil registration project, scheduled to begin in 1988, never became operational because of legislative and political reasons, and in May 1990, the Government decided to give priority to the 1993 census instead of undertaking the demographic survey.

Population policy formulation

21. UNFPA assistance to this sector started in March 1990, with the objective of improving knowledge of the interaction between demographic factors and socio-economic indicators. A seminar which was organized in Oyem in November 1990 proved to be a breakthrough and had a major impact nationwide on decision makers, technicians and the Gabonese population in general. The outcome of the seminar along with supporting documents have been disseminated and widely covered in the media. Other achievements in this area include the training of 15 technicians from different ministries in integrating population factors into sectoral development planning.

Women, population and development

22. The main objective of UNFPA assistance in the area of women, population and development was to collaborate with other organizations in helping to improve the condition of rural women in Lebamba district, the area of Gabon where United Nations activities are concentrated and where a major Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)/UNDP agricultural development project is being implemented. UNFPA assistance was specifically directed to integrating population components into these efforts. The main UNFPA activities, which reached some 5,000 women in 16 villages, were: (a) socio-cultural research on the relationship between

women's economic activities and their reproductive role, and on their awareness of this linkage; (b) a seminar on techniques for developing education materials; (c) group discussion on nutrition, maternal health and hygiene and (d) action-oriented research on improving women's status through income-generating activities. However, the potential impact of these activities was limited because of the lack of timely government contributions of financial resources and national personnel.

Other external assistance

23. France is Gabon's major development partner and provides approximately 87 per cent (1989) of total external technical assistance. In the population field, UNFPA is the main donor. In the health sector, Gabon has many partners, including, in addition to France, WHO and UNICEF, as well as Canada, China, Egypt, Germany, Italy and the European Community. An important environment programme is being developed with the support of the European Community, France and UNDP.

IV. PROPOSED PROGRAMME 1992-1996

24. The 1992-1996 programme proposed for UNFPA assistance takes into account the population strategy outlined above, the lessons and experiences learned from the first country programme, and the proposals by the PRSD mission for UNFPA support. The priority areas for UNFPA support would be: population IEC; the Safe Motherhood Initiative; population and development; and women, population and development.

25. The broad objectives of the programme are given in paragraph 3 above. The immediate objectives of the programme would be to assist the Government in: (a) developing and implementing a comprehensive population IEC programme aimed at increasing the level of awareness and understanding of population and related issues among special target groups; (b) continuing the Safe Motherhood programme in Ngounie Province and extending it to two additional provinces and to Libreville; (c) establishing the basis for a national population policy and programme and promoting the integration of population into development planning; and (d) more fully and effectively integrating women into the development process. At this stage, in the absence of reliable health data, it is not possible to set quantified objectives and targets. However, the programme would assist the Government in formulating such objectives as data become available.

26. Given the importance of creating awareness of population issues, including of the health benefits of family planning, the proposed UNFPA programme would include an IEC component in each sector. The Fund would also assist the Government, in collaboration with other donors, in elaborating a national health policy and programme and in integrating the Safe Motherhood Initiative into this policy and programme. The UNFPA programme would continue to provide support to national institution building, placing emphasis on training in the ministries concerned with women's promotion, education, health, population education, and planning. The programme would promote community and NGO participation in programme design, implementation and evaluation and make use of operations research in order to assure that the socio-cultural situation of the country is taken into account in programme design.

Maternal and child health and family planning

27. Under the proposed programme, the objectives of UNFPA assistance in the area of MCH/FP would be to assist the Government in reducing maternal mortality and morbidity and in addressing the problem of sterility. To achieve these objectives, UNFPA would support the Government's efforts to extend the Safe Motherhood Initiative nationwide as a part of the public health system, taking special care to provide health

care and services to those women at highest risk during pregnancy. UNFPA assistance would be concentrated in three provinces (out of a total of nine) and in Libreville. Together, these areas account for 66 per cent of women of reproductive age in Gabon, 50 per cent of the hospitals and MCH services, 70 per cent of the total number of doctors and 77 per cent of the country's paramedicals. The Safe Motherhood activities started in Ngounie and Haut-Ogooué Provinces in January 1991 would be expanded so as to cover these provinces entirely by the end of 1993 and then would be extended to Woleu-Ntem Province in 1994.

28. UNFPA would continue to stress the importance of introducing family planning as an essential component of the Safe Motherhood Initiative by developing messages on the health benefits of family planning, particularly as regards the health of women and the survival of their children. The messages would also aim at sensitizing decision makers, health personnel, parliamentarians and opinion leaders as to the importance of revising the legislation on the advertising and sale of contraceptives.

29. UNFPA assistance would be used to support advisory services, provide training, conduct operations research for IEC in support of Safe Motherhood activities and provide equipment. Special attention would be given to informing and educating women and men on the Safe Motherhood Initiative and corresponding services. Staff directly involved in service delivery (midwives, birth attendants, village health workers) would be trained to integrate Safe Motherhood activities into the services they provide. UNFPA would collaborate with other partners in the health sector (e.g., WHO, UNICEF, France, the European Community, various national and international NGOs), in formulating and implementing these activities and would also assist the Government in strengthening the National Safe Motherhood Committee.

30. The proposed programme would also address the problem of sterility through information and educational activities, covering such issues as the prevention of STDs, including AIDS, and the problems of early pregnancy and abortion, especially among adolescents. UNFPA would support research in collaboration with the Centre International des Recherches Médicales at Franceville (CIRMF) on the causes and consequences of infertility.

31. UNFPA proposes to support MCH/FP activities in the amount of $600,000.

Information, education and communication

32. UNFPA would support the use of a combination of interpersonal and mass communication strategies to achieve the following objectives: (a) to assist the Government in developing and implementing a national population IEC strategy and programme; (b) to promote awareness among decision makers, planners, sectoral ministries, NGOs and the general public on the importance of population and family health issues for socio-economic development; and (c) to educate youth both in and out of school in responsible parenthood. A total amount of $800,000 would be provided to the IEC sector.

33. Information and communication. UNFPA would continue to provide support to consolidate and strengthen the Directorate General of Education in the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture so that it can function effectively as a technical unit to develop, produce and disseminate educational materials at the request of sectoral ministries and play a coordinating role in the field of population IEC. UNFPA would secure technical backstopping for the Directorate, as well as provide further training, both in country and in the region, of the Directorate's staff in research methodology, management of IEC programmes and the interrelationship of population and development. The Fund would also support training for media professionals in population issues. Information campaigns would be developed and oriented to specific groups

with an emphasis on young people in sport clubs, youth clubs, artists groups and the workplace. For maximum effect, such campaigns would be linked to activities in the formal education sector. UNFPA support for such activities would be $300,000.

34. Formal population education. As part of the effort to integrate population education into the formal school curriculum, UNFPA would continue to support ongoing activities in secondary schools to educate students about adolescent pregnancy and about STDs. UNFPA support would focus on providing technical assistance to improve the content of the educational materials and on training for provincial staff. Because of the near-total school enrolment in Gabon, the introduction of family life education into the school curricula is of strategic importance. Such introduction into the curricula will begin on a pilot basis in six schools between mid-1992 and mid-1994 and cover such subjects as geography, biology and civic education. Related activities would include undertaking an inventory of existing education and information materials in family life education, carrying out socio-cultural research, training teachers in family life education, and developing education material modules based on the socio-cultural research. Beginning in 1995, activities would be extended nationwide and would cover the school population in grades 5 and 6 at the primary level and in grades 1 and 2 at the secondary level. UNFPA support to this component would be $500,000.

Data collection and analysis

35. UNFPA would assist the Government in achieving the sectoral objectives of establishing a reliable demographic database and strengthening national capabilities to collect and analyse demographic data. UNFPA, in collaboration with other donors, would assist the Government in undertaking the 1993 Population and Housing Census, which is a government priority. UNFPA assistance would cover technical backstopping and the training of staff in the Statistical Office. The training would, as much as possible, be provided by regional institutions. Total UNFPA support to this sector would amount to $150,000.

Population policy formulation

36. The objectives in this sector, to which UNFPA proposes to provide $250,000, are: (a) to establish the bases for a national population policy and action plan; and (b) to integrate population issues into socio-economic development planning.

37. UNFPA would provide assistance to the Directorate of Global Planning within the Ministry of Planning, Economy and Regional Development to enable it to formulate and implement a comprehensive training programme concerning the interrelationship between population and development. UNFPA would also support the Directorate's efforts to develop a research programme to analyse such issues as human resource development, migration, and the interaction between population and development, as well as to establish a database of demographic and socio-economic indicators for development planning.

38. UNFPA would also support the development of a strong IEC component to sensitize important target groups such as high-level decision makers, technicians, political and religious leaders and representatives of national NGOs as to the need to take population into account in development activities. The aim would be to lay the foundation for the development of a national framework for population activities and, later, for the formulation of a national population policy.

39. UNFPA would continue to stress the importance of the interrelationship between population and the environment and would work closely with the European Community, France and UNDP to ensure that the

environment programme being developed by the Government with the assistance of these donors takes population into account. UNFPA would also support research aimed at gaining a better understanding of the linkages between population, the environment and development in Gabon.

Women, population and development

40. The primary objective in the area of women, population and development would be to assist the Government in strengthening the institutional capacity of the Directorate General for the Promotion of Women to promote the active involvement of women in population activities and to fully and effectively integrate them into the development process. Emphasis would be placed on developing the Directorate's technical, coordinating and management skills to enable Directorate staff to review, monitor and evaluate women, population and development activities being implemented by sectoral ministries, NGOs and women's groups. This component would be supported by the mass media and women's professional associations. UNFPA assistance would also contribute to strengthening Gabon's documentation centre on women, population and development. Total UNFPA support to this sector would be $150,000.

Programme reserve

41. An amount of $50,000 would be held in reserve for new proposals that would be developed within the framework of the proposed programme.

Programme coordination

42. In agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the Directorate for Global Planning within the Ministry of Planning, Economy and Regional Development would have the responsibility for coordinating and monitoring all external assistance. It would also coordinate the population programme. UNFPA would ensure that effective collaboration would take place with UNDP and with UNICEF in programme formulation, implementation and evaluation and would maintain close contact with other donors and NGOs in the field of population. UNFPA would also convene quarterly meetings for key national and international personnel working on population activities to review programme implementation and coordination. UNFPA would continue to coordinate activities with its partner agencies in the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) in particular.

Programme monitoring, evaluation and management

43. In order to involve national counterparts more closely in the full programming cycle, the UNFPA field office would organize training in project formulation, management, monitoring and evaluation. Whatever the mode of execution, UNFPA will make full use of available and appropriate national and regional technical backstopping capacities, complemented by the country programme technical support teams that will become operational in 1992 as part of the UNFPA successor support cost arrangements approved by the Governing Council in decision 91/37. UNFPA would monitor and evaluate programme activities in accordance with standard UNFPA guidelines. A mid-term review of the programme would be organized jointly with UNDP in 1994 and would be the starting point of the next PRSD exercise and programme cycle. Other United Nations agencies, donors and NGOs would be involved in this exercise. The UNFPA Country Director assigned in Brazzaville, Congo, would monitor the implementation of the programme and visit Gabon on a regular basis.

Financial summary

44. As indicated in paragraph 1, UNFPA would provide assistance in the amount of $2 million. The breakdown by programme area is as follows:

	UNFPA regular resources $
Maternal and child health and family planning	600,000
Information, education and communication	800,000
Data collection and analysis	150,000
Population policy formulation	250,000
Women, population and development	150,000
Programme reserve	50,000
TOTAL	2,000,000

V. RECOMMENDATION

45. The Executive Director recommends that the Governing Council:

(a) Approve the programme for Gabon in the amount of $2 million for the five-year period 1992-1996;

(b) Authorize the Executive Director to programme, subject to the availability of funds, an amount of $2 million from UNFPA's regular resources, over the period 1992-1996;

(c) Further authorize the Executive Director to allocate the funds and make appropriate arrangements with the Government of Gabon and with the executing agencies.